



# Drayton Hall

Drayton Hall is foremost an architectural wonder. It is the oldest and one of the most important examples of Georgian-Palladian architecture in America. The structure of the house follows many of the rules of architecture found in Andrea Palladio's 1570 treatise, *Four Books of Architecture*. The great hall on the first floor is flanked by smaller rooms in a symmetrical floor plan and the house itself is framed by "flanker" buildings to the north and south. The hierarchy of the Greek orders — Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian — is observed from room to room, with Doric embellishments in the great hall, Ionic in the withdrawing room, and Corinthian in the upper great hall. A recessed, two-story portico serves as the entrance to the house. The portico is thought to have been inspired by the Villa Pisani, which Palladio designed in 1552. This is the first example executed in the American colonies and set a model for other building campaigns.

Drayton Hall has miraculously survived for nearly three centuries, remaining largely intact without substantial damage or alterations. This despite major earthquakes, hurricanes, and two wars—it was virtually unscathed when occupied by both British and colonial armies during the Revolution and was the only structure left standing after an 1865 rampage of Charleston by Union Troops in the Civil War. Now oper-

ated as a museum by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the house and grounds attract visitors year-round.

Construction of Drayton Hall began in 1738 and continued into 1744. The vision of twenty-three-year-old John Drayton (1715/16–1779), a wealthy plantation manager, Drayton Hall was not to be a traditional working plantation. Rather, the house and its 350-acre grounds formed the owner's country estate, emulating English estates of the period. Seven generations of Draytons passed through Drayton Hall until the time of its sale to the National Trust in 1974. Instead of restoring the house to its original eighteenth-century condition, the National Trust preserved the house as it was in 1974. The result is a three-dimensional timeline of change and continuity in American architecture over three centuries. The withdrawing room retains its original hand-carved ceiling while a cast plaster ceiling in the great hall dates from the 1880s. Some of the house's original Georgian mantelpieces were replaced with more fashionable Federal mantelpieces by John Drayton's son, Charles Drayton (1743–1820), in the early 1800s. Landscape features have also changed throughout the centuries, shaped by weather, use, and shifting tastes. The current grounds, a true amalgamation of the property's history, features a Victorian garden mound and reflecting pond, 250-year-old oak trees, and a

"ha-ha," an eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century landscape feature that served as a barrier to livestock from entering the formal gardens.

Drayton Hall is shown to visitors without furnishings; the architecture and decorative features are the focus of interpretation. As such, many people are unaware of the incredible collections of material culture, decorative arts, manuscripts, and archaeological objects that are housed in storage and research facilities where they are made available to independent scholars



A collection of Chinese export tea bowls, Yongzheng Period (ca. 1722–1750). Painted (overglaze) with a pair of cranes, mosquitoes, and seaweed on the reverse, motifs fitting of the Lowcountry. Owned by John Drayton (1715–1779) and archaeologically uncovered at Drayton Hall.

**ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT:**  
Detail of the overmantel in the great hall.  
Drayton Hall from across the pond.





**ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT:**

The stair hall.

The withdrawing room.

**RIGHT:**

Drayton linen press, 1790–1810. Produced in Charleston from cypress. Photograph by George C. Williams. The press displays stylistic influence of Salem, Massachusetts, but contains traces of cypress, a wood indigenous to the Charleston area. It is believed that it was purchased by Charles Drayton when he renovated the house according to his taste in the early nineteenth century.

and researchers by request. Furniture survives from different periods in Drayton Hall's history, including a linen press, constructed circa 1790–1810. Several pieces of restored furniture, which were previously held in the collection of the Heyward-Washington House in downtown Charleston, are making their way back to Drayton Hall thanks to the Drayton family who arranged an agreement between the two organizations.

When the National Trust acquired Drayton Hall in the 1970s, an archaeological campaign revealed a wealth of material in the ground. Notably, groupings of Chinese export porcelain, mid-eighteenth-century gilded creamers, and salvers, typically found only in Europe. The collection helps historians to reconstruct everyday life at given periods in Drayton Hall's history and yields information about the Drayton family's contacts in the larger world as well as trade activity in the Port of Charleston.

In addition to the on-going analysis of Drayton Hall's collection, recent archaeological field work has revealed a house dating from the 1680s buried underneath Drayton Hall. The house was occupied by a man who traded Venetian beads for deer skins with Native Americans in the area. This discovery underscores the fact that the preservation staff has only touched the surface of what is one of the oldest known domestic buildings in the state. As further excavation and research continues, the site will likely reveal hitherto unknown information about life beyond the city limits of Charleston. @



**Drayton Hall** is located at 3380 Ashley River Road, Charleston, South Carolina. For more information call 843.769.2600 or visit [www.draytonhall.org](http://www.draytonhall.org).